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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4855
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1021
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA 0043
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9793
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0254
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4251
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1713
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3441
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0438
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6890
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4506
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0835
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0838
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0533
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2777
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0419
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001036

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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: IN BURMA, SMALL NGO EFFORTS SCORE BIG IMPACT

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: While international NGOs and organizations in Burma face increasing pressure on their activities (reftel), local initiatives to improve health and educational and meet other basic development needs are growing. These projects, often organized by NLD-affiliated civic leaders and funded at least in part by donations from foreign tourists and other overseas sources, are generally unregistered. They operate in an informal, low-key manner to avoid the need to seek official blessing or raise GOB concerns. Many make a significant impact on their target communities, and offer us vehicles to develop civil society and local leaders. END SUMMARY

Health Care in the Inle Lake Region

12. (SBU) Relying largely on private foreign donations, former NLD Central Committee member U Ohn Maung funded the creation and staffing of a large clinic in his Shan hometown of Naungshwe. The clinic, opened in 2005, provides services to 50 villages daily and is open seven days a week, according to the clinic's resident doctor. U Ohn Maung invites foreign doctors visiting the Inle Lake region as tourists to the clinic; many subsequently donate equipment and pharmaceuticals. The clinic's resident doctor recently used donations to purchase blood-testing equipment in Bangkok. New additions to the clinic building will house a surgery bay, an x-ray room, and a maternity ward. The doctor estimates the total value of the clinic's construction exceeds \$100,000, though many of donations were in-kind, such as building supplies and equipment. U Ohn Maung acknowledged that his past as an NLD MP-elect keeps security personnel interested, but says that they have not interfered in the

clinic's work to date.

Water and Medical Care in Kalaw Hills

13. (SBU) In Kalaw, a former British hill station of Kalaw not far from Inle Lake, another former political prisoner and NLD M.P.-elect, Tommy Edzani, runs a small organization -- the Rural Development Society -- to provide nearby Palaung, Pa'o and Danu villages with basic health and nutritional care. Edzani said his NGO has assisted over 250 villages near Kalaw with water systems, health care, education, and sanitation since it began in the mid-1990s. Contrasting RDS' experience building water systems with similar UNDP efforts, Edzani said that he consults regularly with local hill tribes to get their communities' buy-in and also provides the subsistence farmers in local villages with micro-credit loans. The loans allow the farmers to buy fertilizer, increase yields, and even out income disparities between crop seasons. Edzani raises funds by escorting tourists who trek the hill trails to mountain villages to project sites so they can see the needs and his work first-hand. Many tourists continue to provide funding to RDS after they return to the U.S. and Europe.

Philanthropic Monks in Mandalay

14. (SBU) Enjoying one of the highest profiles among the Burma's unconventional civil society projects, the Phaung Daw Oo monastery of Mandalay is led by two monks, U Nayaka and his brother U Zateka, and has provided free education for over 51,392 underprivileged students since it opened for primary school students in 1993. In 2001, the school expanded to include a high school. The quality of the education at the monastery easily surpasses that of government schools, with a mix of the required government curriculum and international-standard courses in computer

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skills, science, and foreign languages. Thanks to a generous funding from the Government of Australia and from private British and Australian donors, the school has expanded and now provides free education to almost 7,000 students per year. Foreign volunteer teachers have helped the Burmese teachers on the school's staff of 148 instructors, resulting in a teaching corps with an excellent command of English and open, international teaching styles. The school has a modern computer lab, extensive library, and well-equipped classrooms, far above the level of resources provided to state schools. Working with the Burnett Institute, the school also runs an HIV/AIDS prevention program for students and offers an anti-TIP module in its high school curriculum. The school's chief concern is that it remains dependent on foreign funding to meet its substantial operating costs.

Former Political Prisoners Running a Free School

15. (SBU) In 2005, a mother and daughter who are both former political prisoners, opened a primary school out of their home near Rangoon for parents who cannot afford the fees needed to send their children to state-run primary schools. They currently provide free education for 130 children, relying on three volunteer teachers. Funding comes from the community and foreigners who have provided donations of books or cash. NLD Youth leader Min Ko Naing quietly assists the school's fundraising. Security officials monitor the school closely, but it continues to operate without interference despite a recent tightening of GOB control over private education. The mother-daughter team hope to offer their volunteer teachers a regular monthly salary of 30,000 kyat (USD 24).

Buddhist Groups Helping People with AIDS

16. (U) In Rangoon, a collective of Buddhist associations named "Yetana Metta" are providing clinic and in-home care for people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as caring for the

needs of destitute senior citizens and monks. Last year, its Rangoon clinic provided care for 300 persons living with AIDS. Yetana Metta has worked informally since 2004, relying on local private donations and a small amount of UNICEF funding, and is applying this year for official registration as an indigenous NGO.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: While international donors, INGOs and UN agencies find it increasingly difficult to overcome regime paranoia and obstruction of their assistance programs, civic-minded Burmese citizens have found new creative ways to offer rays of hope to those in need. Their small scale and informal organization are key to their success; an enlarged or more formal profile would likely attract negative attention. As we travel around the country, we inform these local groups of our small grants program. Burmese people have become skillful at getting around the military. Our support encourages their efforts and helps potential leaders develop. END COMMENT.
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